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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the use of music activities in teaching English as a second language describes experiences with two different teaching environments and examines the reasons for the success of the approach. In one program, children aged 7 to 17 in an international summer camp learned English through songs and other music-related activities. The younger children used actions with songs, and the older children worked on music projects that related to their musical and social interests. The second program was an adult education class in which music appreciation was taught entirely in English to non-native speakers. These experiences support the belief that language courses should be taught for a specific purpose and with specific subject matter to a specific group to stimulate normal communicative activity, and that an interest in music and related movement is a strong motivator for language learning. (MSE)

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ENGLISH THROUGH MUSIC: Singing TPR, Walking Labs, & Music Matter

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This is a survey report of musical language activities in two different environments: first an account of the activities developed during ten summers working with with children from 7 to 17 in an international sports and language camp in Switzerland; secondly, a report of a shelter subject matter class, "English through Music", taught to adults.

I will first describe the activities and situations (part I & II), then discuss the reasons why I feel they worked (part III). The conclusions, and the field in general, are still very much work in progress to the extent that theory has not fully accounted for the reason *why songs and music work*, although practice has shown them to be effective pedagogical tools.

Part I

Teaching in an international children's camp, I tried, as much as possible, to cue into the children, their natural interests and motivations in their present environment. These were principally sports and having fun, which included a good deal of music and songs.

For the younger children, it was found that any singing was fun, but that they retained more when the songs combined actions. We used a great deal of Total Physical Response (TPR) with them regularly and found they had amazing retention where concrete referents and actions were concerned. Their natural desire to move was also thusly satisfied. Done in this way the songs and language were associated with **play** (see some examples of action-songs appended at the end). In addition to these songs being used a lot in class, they were reinforced at campfires and on hikes. I also wrote different words to known tunes and found students could also easily write words themselves (for examples, see *Tune into English* Pergamon).

The class for these younger learners turned out to be another camp activity to the extent that it didn't resemble an English Class. In fact, I was a little embarassed at the end of camp one summer when the parents of one student were introduced to me and they asked their little 7 year old how she liked her English class. The child looked confused and couldn't answer until her mother rephrased the question and said

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"your class with Tim," and she pointed at me as a concrete referent, "How was it?" The little girl responded in English "Oh, I like it." I realized later that she really did not know she was taking an English class, what she was doing was taking a **"fun" class in English.** "Learning a language" of course is not very high on a child's hiarchy of goals, but having fun is. The language was secondary, as in fact it usually is to everyone except linguists and language teachers.

For the older children it was of course quite different. They had already had about 10 years of schooling and thus had stereotypical expectations about what a language class was suppose to be. Nevertheless we could still use their interests and the situation, and especially their musical interests in the course. But the actual running of the class had to resemble what they were use to. Of course I could not use the action songs except in rare instances when we got along so well that they were willing to regress with me. And even my 1960's folk songs often were grouped by them with classical music.

It should be noted that the **topic of music** is very motivational in itself. There are exploitation possibilities centering around a song[1], but there are many more around the topic of music, that may not include listening to anything, at least not initially, but still use the motivation of music. Just like the topic of sex can stimulate interest without ever actually having any (as all advertisers know); music can be used in a like fashion.

One of most useful exercises is the **musical questionnaire** (Murphey 1987a), asking for student interests, favourite groups, radio stations, and types of music. These questionnaires can be done for just one class, in the school, or taken out to larger environments. The answers can be tabulated by the students and then articles written for a newsletter. In addition to being a real communicative exercise for the practising of English, the favorite songs, groups, magazines, radio stations, and other data can be used by the teacher as places to find information to exploit later in class.

Another idea not requiring the listening of a song, but which may include them, is **project work**. The summer of *Live Aid* (1985) provided a plethora of material about the reasons for the music-making and the music-making itself. More recently, anti-aparthied became very big on the musical scene with Paul Simon's Grammy winning *Graceland* LP being much played, and *Sun City*, a record produced by artists against apartheid. This of course touches the more general topic of racism and black music. Other song project work may center around drugs, prison, immigration, women's liberation, sexual liberation, and pornography.

The point here is that there is a **reason for music**, just as there is a reason for language. Some teachers seem to want to study language out of context just as certain musicians study music divorced from audience reaction. Other people use language and music for different reasons: it conveys information, represents moods, stands for something. And finally that's what communication is all about.

Another idea for adolescents developed in the last few summers is the use of what I call their **natural language laboratory** - their Walkmans. Almost every adolescent has a Walkman or at least a tape player at home. There are several ways to use them:

1. Record short individual messages with encouragement, some things to take note of, and a little homework assignment for each student. This last can be someone to interview or some information to find out and then record on the tape. Give them a few days to listen to the tape as much as they like and to record their work.

2. Record songs that were presented in class and ask them to record their reaction to the song in a few sentences and then to record one of their favourites for you. They should also record an introduction to the song, saying who the songwriter, artist, or group is, and commenting on why they like this particular song.

3. Give one survey question to each student and have them record answers of a certain number of people. The student must tell interviewees that they must answer in English. The questions asked are very important of course. Students may think of the best questions they want to ask. For example: "What do you think of the food in the cafeteria?" (In a boarding school) "Do you think the bedtimes and wake-up should be changed?" "Who do you want to win Wimbledon and why?" "Which pop group is your favourite and why?" etc.

4. Interview with celebrities in English. e.g. the school principle, other English teachers, English natives in the environment, parents who speak English as a foreign language, done either by the students or by the teacher.

5. Students can make radio interviews of famous people with lines from pop songs being the answers. First the student records his question and then a part of a song, e.g. Mr. Reagan, what did you say to Nancy before your last press conference? "You're my heart, You're my soul, that's the only thing I really know" (Modern Talking). Mrs Thatcher, what do you tell your husband before you go to sleep at night? "Wake me up before you go go"(Wham!). (Note: the easiest way to do this is to have them collect different lines from songs and then to write the questions that would fit the answers.)

Practically, the teacher can collect the tapes and add comments, corrections, advice, and encouragement. In this way the recorded word becomes a real means of communication and a type of record is kept of progress and activities they have done. Students become very interested in each other's tape as well and soon start listening their partners. The teacher gives tapes out like handouts and students return their homework on the tape.

For children between "child" and "teenager" I had to adjust to their maturity and see how much TPR song or teen pop music was appropriate as I got to know them better.

The point is that students **do** something with language and teachers try to use the students' envirnoment and interests. The psychologists Wilga Rivers (1976) says,

"We must find out what our students are interested in. This is our subject matter. As language teachers we are the most fortunate of teachers--all subjects are ours. Whatever the . . . [students] want to communicate about, whatever they want to read about, is our subject matter. The essence of language teaching is providing conditions for language learning -- using the motivation which exists . . ."

The question "Could this also be musically done with adults and how?" is what stimulated the second part of this paper.

Part II: Sheltered Subject Matter - Music

"Subject matter teaching, when it's made comprehensible, is language teaching," according to Stephen Krashen. To try out his idea of "sheltered classes" in which subject matter material is taught to non-natives in English (*The Input Hypothesis*, 1986), I offered an adult evening class "English Through Music" during the fall 1986 (extended by student demand into 1987). Ostensibly the class was set up to examine music while using English as the medium. The course description read as follows:

L'anglais par la musique

A class taught completely in English, for intermediate and advanced students who wish to improve their English through the examination of Pop/Folk/Rock and even some classical music. There will be many different exercise types including written lyrics, active listening, open discussion, and the use of video. The students own musical preferences and choices will be used with the general goal being to improve one's English competence through discussion and examination of our everchanging soundscape.

A small, active group (10) signed up and looked at music in a variety of ways: anthropologically , medically (used in operating rooms, dentists offices, and in musico- and psycho- therapy), in business (jingles, flims, Muzak in stores), and more precisely in the music business (types of music, songs in different languages, the morally-engaged movement, radios, selling a hit, song structures, songwriting, pornographic lyrics, etc.). (For a more complete discription of the course content see Murphey 1987b.)

After seven 90 minute class meetings (+ a social beer afterwards) a feedback questionnaire was given. Although unable to name many specific linguistic items learned, students said they felt more secure expressing themselves and were surprised that they could say so much. Most importantly, they said it was interesting and fun and requested continuing.

Apparently there was unpalpable progress made in terms of psychological security and ease. Thus, I feel, attempts at verifying the usefulness of sheltered classes should not be done by discreet point testing but by holistic tests administered with a control group. However, for the teacher there is no doubt: the psychological advantages of having a class of intensely interested participants is heavenly.

At the end of the term, I again gave them feedback questions, and got some interesting results. Although most admitted coming to the course to improve their English, the fact that we were to handle the topic of music attracted them as well. They had high praise for the new information they possessed about the various domains of musical use and abuse, but they had trouble naming anything they learned concerning English. They lamely said vague things like "I feel like my understanding has improved," and "I speak more now ". This of course is how it should be, for afterall we were not studying language, we were studying music. But did they acquire any language? Of course they had to take in some, just as it's hard to learn how to ski without developing our muscles. But did they learn a lot? Or more than they would have if they had gone to a language class? Instead of answering these questions directly let me try to show some things that I feel were happening that did allow for a host of "language learning opportunities", as Dick Allwright (1986) calls them.

1) **Primary motivations**. First of all, it was the subject matter, music, that got them involved and kept them coming to class, "English" was more of an excuse. Adults more than kids often need some sort of abstract justification for their social conscience; I call this a sense of "schoolishness". It's like a thin person saying he must eat a lot of ice cream to put on weight, or a businessman who explains his double martini by calling it medicine against stress, or our previous example that skiing is good exercise. These things may all be true, but they are not necessarily the primary motivations and I would suggest they are more often than not merely justifying excuses.

2) In any case, an English class of students of such differing levels would have been practically impossible, or at least terribly boring for the advanced. But doesn't it tell us something, that mixed level adult English speakers can all take a subject-matter class together and get along fine? It was possible because the **focus was on common information, experiences, and opinions** that they all had, wanted, or wanted to share, not on their linguistic abilities. They were concentrating on the messages and ideas as they would in their native language.

3) Because I made it clear that I was interested in the subject matter but was by no means an authority and that the students' opinions and information were very valuable to me, an **equal encounter situation was created informationally**, whereas the unequal language territory was not the focus (see Thomas 1983). The "non corrective" pedagogy of the teacher and the patience of the more advanced students tended to down play the linguistic side, giving heavier weight to the information that each participant could generate and share. The relatively equal encounter on the information side approximated what happens in normal communication between adults.

Part III : ***Commentary: English for Special Purposes***

Of course sheltered subject matter teaching leads us into English for Special Purpose (ESP). That is to say, that ESP usually teaches not only English but treats a subject matter at the same time, thus it is intrinsically more interesting to the students. The conclusion that this brings us to is that **language courses perhaps should be taught for a specific purpose (with specific subject matter) to a specific group to simulate normal communicative activity.** It may sound absurd to insist but one must, **effective natural communication does not exist without relevant information being exchanged.**

Unless a "special purpose" can be found for the study and learning of a language then perhaps we should question whether it should be taught at all, because the teaching and learning will probably be inefficient.

Finally, *homo sapiens* is an extremely practical species and doesn't want things or information for simple possession, but for what they can **do** with it. Language teachers sometimes teach as though this isn't true. It's boring running in place and reciting verb conjugations. In sports it's not easy to train and exercise to have all the right muscles without actually doing the sport. We get the muscles by doing it. And we learn a language "doing it", too. By trying to communicate with it, we develop the muscles to do it better. Sure, there are tips to help us out along the way. But the tips won't do much good if we are not doing it at the same time. This is why teaching French in Texas is often about as efficient as teaching snow skiing in central Africa.

The fact that so many students are interested in and motivated by music make it extremely relevant to students wishing to move physically, emotionally, and or intellectually in the actual use, **the doing,** of language. Whether we use child game songs with TPR, pop music and the Walkmans of our students, or chose to discuss musical phenomena, in each case we are doing something concrete that is highly motivational to the particular audience. The ESP of small children is very much one of fun and involves the moving of their bodies to explore and understand their environment. The ESP of adolescents involves learning to cope with their blossoming emotions and identities of which music plays an important associative role. The ESP of adults may be simple dealing with a topic about which they have a keen interest. In each of these ESP's we might say there is Total Physical Response in that they are doing something with language: they are participating actively in the game called communication, and doing it with the gratification of their primary, although at times ulterior and unconcious, motives.

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Notes

1.For regular ideas concerning the exploitation of songs see "Smorgasbord of Song Ideas" (ETAS NL 1985) which presents in abbreviated form many of the ideas which often appear in various teachers journals. I will concentrate here on some, to my knowledge, more novel ideas.

ACTION SONGS FOR CHILDREN

Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes
and eyes and ears and mouth and nose
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes

This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands, wash our hands.
This is the way we wash our hands, early in the morning
(comb our hair, bounce a ball, kick, etc.)

If you're happy and you know it clap your hands
If you're happy and you know it clap your hands
If you're happy and you know it and your really want to know it
If you're happy and you know it clap your hands

Stomp your feet, shout hooray, do all three, etc.

My hat it has three feathers, three feathers has my hat
And had it not three feathers, it would not be my hat
(or three corners)

Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home

I looked over Jordan and what did I see, Coming for to carry me home
A band of angels coming after me, Coming for to carry me home

Swing low, etc.

THE BEAR SONG
One day I went, into the woods; and there I met, a great big bear
He looked at me, I looked at him. He sized me up, I sized up him
He said to me, Why don't you run; I see you ain't got any gun
I said to me, that's a good idea; So come on feet, lets get out of here
And so I ran, away from there; But right behind, me was that bear
Ahead of me, I saw a tree; Oh glory be, a great big tree
The lowest branch, was ten feet up; I had to jump, to trust my luck
And so I jumped, into the air; but I missed that branch, a way up there
Now don't you fret, and don't you frown; Cause I caught that branch, on my way down
That's all there is, there ain't no more; Because my tongue, is getting sore.
(Made up lines: What is your name, my name is _____, how do you do? Very well thank you)

John Jacob Jingle Heimer Smith, his name is my name too (3, 4 ,5)
Whenever we go out, the people always shout, there goes
John Jacob Jingle Heimer Smith, DADADADADADADA (words softer each time while always shouting DaDADA)

Other songs
10 Little Indians, Brother John, My Marvelous Little Toy, Hokey Pokey, and yours.....

Comments on feedback form after seven of fourteen classes. English Through Music
Tim Murphey, Université de Neuchâtel Switzerland

"For me the main benefit is that, as the subject (music) is very interesting, you can forget the language and grammar problems and answer with some spontaneity."

"Listening and speaking in English about something I like."

"-to hear english spoken and speaking english.- to learn more about music because I don't play any instrument and know really nothing about music, now I begin to be more interest in music."

"To come together with other people, likeing also music, discover wich music they listen to. To have the opportunity to speek and read english, otherwise, though, than we it when we were at school."

"Benefits, I didn't learn anything new. I had pleasure to meet other english speaking people and to get together for a "anglophile" club."